

An
International
Meeting
on
Lesbian,
Gay,
and
Bisexual
Concerns
in
Psychology

Sexual Orientation and Mental Health: Toward Global Perspectives on Practice and Policy

Final Report

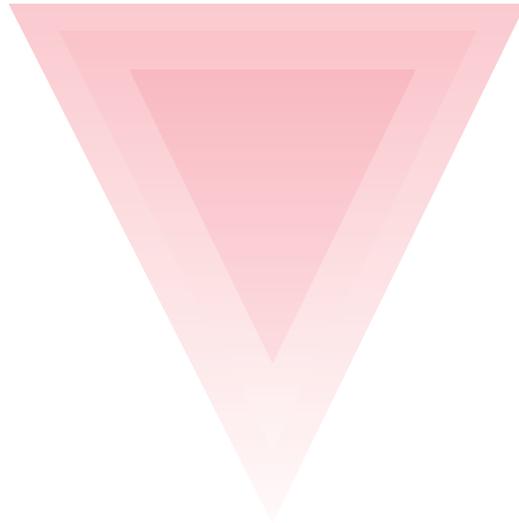
San Francisco,

California,

United States

August 21–23, 2001

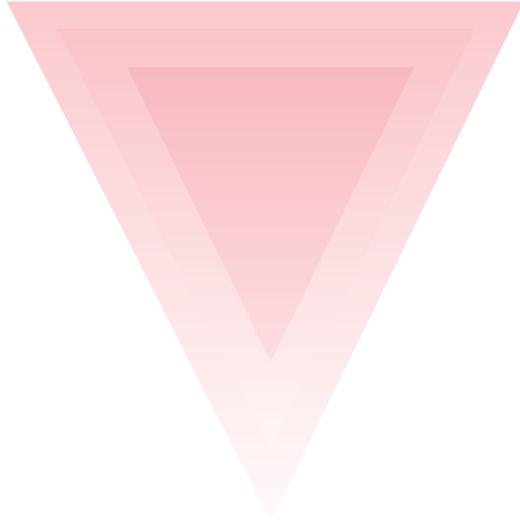




Sexual Orientation and Mental Health: Toward Global Perspectives on Practice and Policy
An International Meeting on
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Preface

The following consensus statement was developed and adopted by the participants in an international meeting, *Sexual Orientation and Mental Health: Toward Global Perspectives on Practice and Policy*. The meeting took place in San Francisco on August 21–23, 2001, in conjunction with the American Psychological Association (APA) 2001 Annual Convention. Participating in the meeting were 49 people from 20 countries and 6 continents.

APA and the Association of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Psychologies Europe (ALGBP–Europe) sponsored the meeting with the following cosponsors: The Australian Psychological Society (APS), Conselho Federal de Psicologia (Brazil), British Psychological Society–Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section, Colombian National Committee of Psychology, the Foundation for the Advancement of Psychology (Colombia), Nederlands Instituut van Psychologen, Nederlandse Vereniging Voor Seksuologie, Schorerstichting (the Netherlands), and the Swiss Psychological Association. Funding for the meeting was provided by the meeting sponsors and by grants from the Committee on Division APA Relations, the Division of International Psychology, the Gamma Mu Foundation (United States), HIVOS–The Humanist Institute for Co-Operation With Developing Countries (the Netherlands), and the Schorerstichting (the Netherlands).

The idea for an international meeting on lesbian, gay, and bisexual concerns in psychology was first initiated in 1997 in discussions among APA member Catherine Acuff, PhD; then-ALGBP-Europe chair Jan Schippers, PhD; and Australian Psychological Society (APS) member Phillip Walcott. When Dr. Acuff was elected to the APA Board of Directors in 1997, she received APA's agreement to sponsor such a meeting. ALGBP-Europe and the APS agreed to cosponsor. An executive committee to plan and conduct the meeting was created consisting of Dr. Acuff representing APA; Dr. Schippers and Dr. Melanie Steffens, ALGBP-Europe chair, representing ALGBP-Europe; and Tony Collins representing the APS. After Dr. Acuff's sudden death in April 2000, Armand Cerbone, PhD, and Kristin Hancock, PhD, were appointed to represent APA on the meeting executive committee in place of Dr. Acuff. Dr. Cerbone and Dr. Steffens cochaired the executive committee, and Clinton Anderson, Charlene DeLong, and Joanna Engstrom of the APA Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns Office provided staff support. An advisory group for the executive committee was also established, consisting of Laura Brown (United States), Paulo Roberto Ceccarelli (Brazil), Florence L. Denmark (United States), James Fitzgerald (United States), Leah Fygetakis (United States), Gloria Gottsegen (United States), Michael Haley (United States), Douglas Haldeman (United States), Harold Kooden (United States), Bianca Cody Murphy (United States), Ruth Ullman Paige (United States), and Daniel Weishut (Israel).

The executive committee established the purpose of the meeting—to improve mental health care for and prevent mental illness within lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations—and its goals and objectives.

Goals

- Increase knowledge among psychologists and other mental health practitioners about sexual orientation and mental health;
- Increase the number of national psychological associations that formally reject the mental disorder conception of homosexuality and that promote mental health practice that is affirmative of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people;
- Increase cross-cultural collaboration among psychological researchers and practitioners who are concerned about the mental health and well-being of lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations; and
- Apply psychological research and mental health practice guidelines focused on lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations to international health policy.

Objectives

- Bring together psychologists and other mental health experts from all over the world to assess current mental health practice and policy as they relate to sexual orientation;
- Develop a consensus statement concerning recommendations for mental health practice and policy for lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations; and
- Establish an international network devoted to promoting mental health care for and preventing mental illness among lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations.

Meeting Program

A program committee was established and charged with developing a program that would achieve these objectives. The members of the meeting program committee were Esther Rothblum (United States) and Theo Sandfort (the Netherlands), cochairs; Ruben Ardila (Columbia); Birgit Eschmann (Germany); Gregory Herek (United States); Hilary Lapsley (New Zealand); Cheryl Potgieter (South Africa); Ian Rivers (United Kingdom); and Phillip Walcott (Australia).

The meeting program consisted of alternating small group sessions to gather knowledge and plenary sessions to share knowledge and build consensus. In the first small group session, the participants met in regional groups to assess practice and policy in their respective regions. The issues identified in the assessment were shared in a plenary session and categorized into themes. In the second small group session, participants worked in thematic groups to develop recommendations to address the identified issues. The executive committee refined the recommendations into a consensus statement and presented them to the meeting participants in a plenary session. The meeting participants reviewed, amended, and accepted the consensus statement presented herein.

Consensus Statement of the Participants of an International Meeting on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns in Psychology

**San Francisco, California, United States
August 21–23, 2001**

This statement represents the consensus of the participants of Sexual Orientation and Mental Health: Toward Global Perspectives on Practice and Policy. It is directed to psychologists, associations to which psychologists belong, and individuals and organizations that have goals similar to the goals of psychologists and their associations.

Definitions of Terms

The terms “lesbian,” “gay,” and “bisexual” will be used to include all aspects of same-sex sexual orientation, including same-sex attraction, identity, and consensual sexual expression. *[Note. The legal age of consent for sexual relations varies among jurisdictions.]* Transgendered people are not consistently included in the recommendations, although the terms “lesbian,” “gay,” and “bisexual” do include transgendered people who self-identify as such. Where transgendered people are not specifically mentioned, this should not be understood to imply that these issues do not apply to them. There were no self-identified transgendered people in attendance, and the majority of the participants were hesitant to speak for transgendered people or felt they lacked information and knowledge on the specific issues that are relevant to them. The participants resolved that future meetings should include transgendered people and should integrate gender identity issues.

Purposes of the Consensus Statement

- Promote the global recognition that same-sex attractions, behavior, and relationships are universal;
- Foster the mental health and well-being of people who experience same-sex attraction, sexual expression, and sexual orientation identity; and
- Increase the understanding of lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities and lives.

The participants of the conference acknowledged the following cultural contexts for an appropriate and accurate understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered persons:

- Gender, gender identity, and gender expression are aspects of human diversity that have important connections with same-sex sexuality;
- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are diverse in gender, age, race, ethnicity, disability, and social and economic class; and
- Religion has very important influences on culture and on individual experience.

The participants also acknowledged the following points as critical to addressing the mental health needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons:

- The concepts of family and family structures must be used flexibly;
- Respect for the diversity in culture and opposition to oppression are both fundamental to achieving our goals; and
- Affirmative action is needed to attend to the needs of developing countries and to allocate resources to them in order to balance the dominance of Western male perspective.

Recommendations

AFFIRMATIVE CARE FOR LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL PERSONS

- Eliminate prejudice and discrimination against lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in all psychological practices and other related fields.
- Remove homosexuality and other sexual-orientation-related disorders from medical and psychiatric classifications and eliminate the harmful influences on practice, research, and education and training that survive from such classification.
- Create new and change existing systems of care delivery at all levels—individual, community, and societal—to promote accessible, high-quality affirmative mental health care for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

PREVENTION

Promote the prevention of mental health problems and adjustment difficulties among lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- Promote safe educational environments for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people at all levels, from primary school to postdoctoral training.
- Promote access at all levels of training to accurate educational materials and remove outdated and inaccurate educational materials.
- Promote adequate education and training to all psychology students (university and postdoctoral levels), covering current scientific research on sexual orientation, attitude training, and training in skills required for providing high-quality affirmative mental health care for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.
- Promote international exchange of information, for example, by expanding Internet resources, encouraging translations, and providing international scholarships.

RESEARCH

- Promote high-quality research that incorporates diverse content areas and methodologies and encourages international collaboration.
- Promote national and international research opportunities, resources, and funding.
- Promote international publication of lesbian, gay, and bisexual research for both professional and general audiences.

NETWORKING

- Create channels for distribution of accurate information.
- Collaborate with existing networks and organizations to pursue mutual goals.
- Promote the formation of new lesbian, gay, and bisexual affirmative coalitions and groups and support existing affirmative groups.

SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT AND POLICY

- Foster positive views of same-sex sexual expression and counteract the effects of discrimination and victimization based on gender expression and sexual orientation.
- Advocate for and support equal treatment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people under the law, including decriminalization of consensual adult same-sex behavior and establishment of nondiscrimination laws and policies.
- Improve the quality of life for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered individuals.
- Encourage psychological associations to develop ethical and professional guidelines that address lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues in human services, education and training, and research.
- Provide accurate information and improve the quality of information on lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in the media and for the general public.

Implementation

By successfully sponsoring the meeting and publishing the Consensus Statement of the Participants contained in this document, two of the three objectives of the meeting executive committee have been achieved. The meeting and the consensus statement were not ends in themselves, but means to the larger purpose of improving the mental health and well-being of people with same-sex orientation and people of transgendered experience. The third objective of the meeting executive committee was to establish an international network devoted to promoting mental health care for and preventing mental illness among lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations. During the meeting, participants met in regional groups to develop shared action plans for their regions. Two of the regions, for example, proposed to sponsor a second international meeting in their regions.

In order to support the maintenance and growth of the international network, the American Psychological Association has provided an electronic forum called INET (the International Network for Psychological Perspectives on Same-Gender Sexual Orientation and Transgender Diversity). The forum aims to strengthen global ties among psychologists and mental health workers concerned with same-sex sexual orientation and transgender issues. The goal of the forum is to advance understanding through the exchange of information and ideas, through the provision of mutual support in professional practice and research, and through the encouragement of collaborative research endeavors.

For more information about the international network, its current activities, and its future plans, contact the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns Office, American Psychological Association, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242; (202) 336-6041; FAX: (202) 336-6040, INET@apa.org; [Http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbci/international.html](http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbci/international.html).

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